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ABSTRACT

Information is presented on part-time male students entering the departments of commerce, engineering, and science of the University of New South Wales in 1969. The major purpose of the survey was to obtain information relevant to the general studies program. In addition to asking the student his views on general studies, information was obtained on background characteristics, reasons for coming to the university, expectations, and ideas about the purposes of a university education. Reasons for part-time study include financial problems, poor school performance, independence, and uncertainty about future employment opportunities. A low success rate was found for part-time students. It is suggested that these failing students will drop out either by choice or because the university may not consider them suitable for further study. Comparative data on full-time students are presented, and suggestions for the university to meet the needs of part-time students are offered. (SW)

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FOREWORD

This Monograph is based on information gathered in a survey of students entering the University of New South Wales in 1969. Whilst the primary objective of the survey was to compile information to be used in an evaluation of a programme of study - General Studies - there were a number of by-products which are of relevance to some other major problems. One of these is the problem of part-time students: their characteristics relative to full-time students, the reasons for their choice of part-time versus full-time study, as well as their relative academic success rate.

Mrs. Barrett has considered the relevant data and presents information which is not only of inherent interest but challenges some beliefs which are frequently voiced by the public and educationalists.

F.M. Katz,
Director.

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PART-TIME STUDENTS

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

The fourth report of the Australian Universities Commission¹ refers only once to part-time students in the body of its text. It notes with interest that the part-time component of university enrolment is decreasing. However, in their estimates for 1970-1972, the number of part-time students is expected to increase by one thousand over the triennium to 29,470. A number of this magnitude would indicate that, percentage decline apart, the part-time student is very much a fact of life. Hence, any information that we have about these students will be of great importance and enable the decisions made about part-time study to be based on fact rather than on uninformed guesswork. Unfortunately, we still have very little information about the part-time student apart from that which indicates that he has a poor record academically. We know far more about his full-time colleague.

During the sixties some attempts have been made to describe the part-time student, particularly studies concerned with his progress at University. Anderson² summarises the results of earlier studies on part-time performance, all of which comment on his low success rate. Meddleton³ lists the differences between full- and part-time students and suggests the need for continuing research. At the Conference on Part-Time Teaching in Australian Universities, Schonell⁴ in his concluding remarks comments: "We need more basic research on this group before we can get down to the job of teaching them."

The only study to emerge out of this earlier recognition of the need for research in this area has been a study at the Australian National University⁵. Findings from this study indicate that when considering pass rates for part-time students one must distinguish between students who fail at the examination and those who withdraw for other reasons. It is the latter category which accounts largely for the low graduation rate of part-time students. This study, in addition, lists certain characteristics of part-time students at the Australian National University, such as their lower socio-economic level, their lower matriculation scores, and their greater age when compared with full-time students.

However, part-time students at the Australian National University may not be, and probably are not, representative of part-time students at other universities. There, for the most part, they are public servants studying

Arts and Commerce with a view to improving their position in that service. On the other hand, at the University of New South Wales, many part-time students are studying in the science-based faculties as well as in Commerce. Some are on cadetships, many have selected to do part-time study because they consider occupational chances to be enhanced by vocational experience.

This present report will describe the part-time student at this university and at the same time will compare and contrast him with the part-time student as described in other studies.

Procedure

In February 1969, incoming first year students were asked to participate in a survey of student characteristics. The major purpose of the survey was to obtain information relevant to the General Studies Programme at the university. However, the questionnaire, in addition to asking the student his views on General Studies, also sought information about his background, both socio-economic and scholastic; it asked his reasons for coming to university, what he expected to gain from attendance here, and what he felt were the purposes of a university education. Both full- and part-time students in all faculties took part in the survey.

In this report only male students entering the faculties of Commerce, Engineering and Science will be considered. These three faculties have a relatively large proportion of part-time students which enables comparisons to be made with full-time students.

Findings

Table 1 gives the number of full-time and part-time students in these faculties who commenced first year in 1969 and also the number of students who completed the questionnaire.

Earlier studies have suggested⁶ that part-time students are, on an average, about six years older than full-time students. However, at this University the part-time student is only two years older. In 1969⁷ the average age of full-time undergraduates was 20.8 years, that of part-time undergraduates was 22.7. Table 2 gives the age of students in the sample under consideration.

Part-time students are also said to come from a lower socio-economic group and to have parents with a lower standard of education. Table 3 gives the occupation of students' fathers. Here there is a significant difference at the five percent level. However, 30% of part-time students have fathers

in the professional and managerial categories. More part-time Science students have professional fathers than full-time Commerce students. There are more part-time students in Science and Engineering whose fathers are skilled tradesmen but the percentage from manual workers' homes does not vary between full- and part-time students. Table 4 and 5 show the level of fathers' and mothers' education respectively. In neither case is there a significant difference between full- and part-time students. It is of interest to note, however, that fathers of both full- and part-time students in Engineering and Science have a higher level of education than fathers of Commerce students.

Type of school attended is given in Table 6. Over-all, the difference between full- and part-time students in the three faculties is significant but this is accounted for entirely by the large number of privately educated full-time students in Commerce. Differences between full- and part-time students in Science and Engineering are not significant.

One of the reasons frequently given for students attending university part-time is the lack of a scholarship. However, although more full-time students have scholarships, nevertheless a number of part-time students have scholarships of various types. Table 7 shows the number and type of scholarships held in these three faculties.

Mean Higher School Certificate marks are given in Table 8. This table shows that the marks of part-time students in each faculty are slightly lower than those of full-time students in that faculty. However, marks also vary to the same extent between faculties. Although within faculties the mean mark of part-time students is somewhat lower, the difference is insufficient to account for the much lower success rate of the part-time student. This will be referred to later in this article.

The foregoing data would suggest that in the science-based faculties, full- and part-time students are not very different from one another when judged on socio-economic variables. Other data analysed suggests that the motivation of the part-time student to attend university is somewhat lower than that of the full-time student. Table 9 gives the number of students answering "Very Important" or "Important" to a number of statements relating to reasons for attending university. Fewer part-time students had always assumed that they would go to university and a smaller percentage said that they came to university because their parents wanted them to come. When asked how strong their desire was to be at university, 50% of full-time students answered "Very Strong" compared to 40% of part-time students.

For part-time students the main reason for coming to the University of New South Wales was that this was the only university to offer their particular course part-time. They were not so influenced as full-time students by the technological reputation of the University or by the reputation of the particular department in which they were to study.

Conclusions

It would appear that the reasons for choice of part-time versus full-time study are more complex than is frequently stated. The reasons commonly given for students attending university on a part-time basis have been mainly socio-economic and/or scholastic. Part-time students are said to come from lower class backgrounds where there is insufficient money available for university fees and the student's upkeep. This forces him to go to work. At the same time it is said that his pre-university performance is not of a high enough standard to gain admittance to full-time courses or for the award of a scholarship. However, data from this study would suggest that while lack of finance and poor school performance may still be a reason for part-time study, additional reasons may lead other students to choose a part-time course. They may prefer the independence it affords, particularly if they wish to live away from home. Uncertainty about employment opportunities three or four years hence may be another reason. Some firms still prefer to recruit staff at the post high school level and to train them on a part-time basis. We need to know far more about the motivations of students who choose to study part-time of their own free will.

Unfortunately the choice of part-time study, if made voluntarily rather than of necessity, may well have disastrous results as far as academic success is concerned. Of the part-time students in Science who gained entry to first year by means of the 1968 Higher School Certificate, only 13% passed all subjects attempted at the end of first year. Forty-three percent failed at least one subject and 43% either failed all subjects attempted or did not sit for the examinations. In Commerce the pass rate was higher, 44% passing all first stage subjects. However, 37% of Commerce part-time students either failed all subjects attempted or did not sit for the examinations. This compares with the much smaller percentage (14%) of full-time Commerce students who failed all of first year or did not sit for the examinations.

This low success rate of part-time students is a matter of grave concern as most of these failing students will drop out, either from choice, or because

the university may not consider them suitable for further study. Barclay⁸ in his paper presented at the Third Australian Universities Conference asked whether low graduation rates in part-time study are inherent in part-time study itself or do they reflect current procedures in the teaching of part-time students. The foregoing data would suggest that most part-time students have the same potential for success as the full-time student. Their lack of success cannot be blamed on their being inferior students; nor is there reason to believe that they are declining in quality.

What then should be done in universities to improve the lot of the part-time student? How can we ensure that he makes the best possible use of the limited time he has available for study? It is generally agreed by those most concerned with part-time studies that we should know much more about the student, both when he first enters university and throughout his time on campus. We should know why he has chosen to study part-time, particularly if other alternatives appear to be possible; we should also know what he hopes to gain from his attendance at university and how much time he expects to be able to devote to study. Under a semester system it should be possible for part-time students to accumulate the units necessary for their degree over an unspecified period of time. With limited time available for study it is often difficult for students to cope with what is at present required for any particular stage of the course.

Unfortunately many members of staff within universities regard part-time studies as somewhat inferior to full-time studies and do not give sufficient attention to them. Lectures and tutorials are held more for the convenience of staff rather than students, with poor attendance as a consequence. However, as long as universities continue to offer part-time courses, staff involved have an obligation to put the student first and to do everything possible to assist him with his studies. They should also experiment with teaching methods to find those best suited to part-time studies. As suggested by Cohen⁹ at the Third Australian Universities Conference, why require part-time students to attend lectures? Far better to supply them with taped lectures to which they can listen in their own time at home. Time spent at university can be more profitably employed with tutorials.

Finally, students who do decide to attend university on a part-time basis should be made more fully aware of the difficulties in front of them. Employers should also be discouraged from recruiting staff at 18 and training them on a part-time basis. They should be encouraged to provide more scholarships on a full-time basis with a view to employing graduates.

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I.V. Meddleton; loc.cit., p.149.
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9. S. W. Cohen; Third Australian Universities Conference, University of New South Wales, May, 1971.

TABLE 1

INCOMING FIRST YEAR STUDENTS, 1969

	Full-Time			Part-Time			Total Sample
Faculty	Sample	Prelim. Enrol.*		Sample	Prelim. Enrol.*		
	n	N	$\frac{n}{N}$	n	N	$\frac{n}{N}$	
Commerce	204	275	74	312	351	88	516
Engineering	378	414	91	173	189	92	551
Science	225	254	88	91**	87	100	316
TOTAL	807	943	86	576	627	92	1383

* Preliminary enrolment figures as at 31st March, 1969.

** Probably includes a few students who should have been in Biological Sciences or Vocational Studies and were unsure of their faculty.

TABLE 2
AGE DISTRIBUTION - INCOMING STUDENTS

Age of Students	Commerce				Engineering				Science				Total			
	F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
17 and under	25	12	41	13	61	16	20	12	34	15	12	13	120	15	73	13
18	118	58	142	46	217	57	91	53	132	59	36	40	467	58	269	47
19	28	14	39	12	50	13	13	7	31	14	15	16	109	13	67	12
20	12	6	11	3	19	5	6	3	4	2	4	4	35	4	21	4
21	4	2	13	4	10	3	9	5	4	2	5	5	18	2	27	5
Over 21	9	4	56	18	14	4	24	14	13	6	17	19	36	4	97	17
No Information	8	4	10	3	7	2	10	6	7	3	2	2	22	3	22	4
TOTAL	204		312		378		173		225		91		807		576	

TABLE 3
FATHERS' OCCUPATIONS - INCOMING STUDENTS, 1969

Occupational Level	Commerce				Engineering				Science				Total			
	F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T*		P/T*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Professional (doctor, lawyer, teacher, etc.)	17	8	40	13	69	18	18	10	41	18	16	18	127	16	74	13
Managerial (company director, senior executive, etc.)	65	32	73	23	79	21	31	18	51	23	12	13	195	24	116	20
Farmer or grazier (owns or manages)	3	1	10	3	18	5	6	3	10	4	5	6	31	4	21	4
Owens or manages a small business (shopkeeper, small factory owner, etc.)	38	19	40	13	45	12	16	9	18	8	11	12	101	13	67	12
Skilled worker or technician (nurse, hairdresser, lab. assistant, etc.)	32	16	57	18	57	15	46	27	36	16	23	25	125	15	126	22
Clerical or sales	15	7	36	11	43	11	25	14	23	10	9	10	81	10	70	12
Service occupations (transport, police, armed services, etc.)	9	4	13	4	17	4	6	3	14	6	3	3	40	5	22	4
Manual workers (cleaners, assemblers, etc.)	12	6	25	8	32	8	13	7	16	7	6	7	60	7	44	8
Not known or uncertain	13	6	18	6	18	5	12	7	16	7	6	7	47	6	36	6
TOTAL	204		312		378		173		225		91		807		576	

* $\chi^2 = 14.58$, 7 df, $p < .05$. Comparison between total F/T and P/T students by level of fathers' occupation ('Not known or uncertain' not included)

TABLE 4

FATHERS' EDUCATION - INCOMING STUDENTS, 1969

Fathers' Educational Level	Commerce				Engineering				Science				Total			
	F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T*		P/T*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Primary only	29	14	36	11	48	13	19	11	38	17	12	13	115	14	67	12
Some Secondary	83	41	149	48	151	40	77	44	84	37	40	44	318	39	266	46
Completed Secondary	26	13	38	12	51	13	22	13	26	12	9	10	103	13	69	12
Some Tertiary	23	10	26	8	44	12	17	10	21	9	9	10	88	11	52	9
Completed Tertiary	34	17	50	16	75	20	28	16	48	21	18	20	157	19	96	17
No Information	9	4	13	4	9	2	10	6	8	4	3	3	26	3	26	4
TOTAL	204		312		378		173		225		91		807		576	

* $\chi^2 = 8.33$, 4 df, N.S. Comparison between total F/T and P/T students by level of fathers' education (Category of 'No Information' not included).

TABLE 5
MOTHERS' EDUCATION - INCOMING STUDENTS, 1969

Mothers' Educational Level	Commerce				Engineering				Science				Total			
	F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T*		P/T*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Primary only	28	14	32	10	54	14	22	13	27	12	11	12	109	13	65	11
Some Secondary	105	51	148	47	182	48	86	50	126	56	47	52	413	51	281	49
Completed Secondary	41	20	91	29	90	24	38	22	41	18	19	21	172	21	148	26
Some Tertiary	9	3	17	5	14	4	6	3	9	4	4	4	32	4	27	5
Completed Tertiary	11	5	12	4	24	6	12	7	16	7	7	8	51	6	31	5
No Information	10	5	12	4	14	4	9	5	6	3	3	3	30	4	24	4
TOTAL	204		312		378		173		225		91		807		576	

* $\chi^2 = 5.07$, 4 df, N.S. Comparison between total F/T and P/T students by level of mothers' education (Category of 'No Information' not included).

TABLE 6
TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED - INCOMING STUDENTS, 1969

Type of School Attended	Commerce				Engineering				Science				Total			
	F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T*		P/T*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
State	91	45	209	67	257	68	118	68	144	64	58	64	492	61	385	67
Roman Catholic	53	26	62	20	66	17	25	14	49	22	13	14	168	21	100	17
Other Private	43	21	20	6	29	8	8	5	15	7	10	11	87	11	38	7
Overseas	1	**	7	2	5	1	10	6	4	2	1	1	10	1	18	3
Other	7	3	5	2	18	5	5	3	7	3	7	7	32	4	17	3
No Information	9	4	9	3	3	1	7	4	6	3	2	2	18	2	18	3
TOTAL	204		312		378		173		225		91		807		576	

* $\chi^2 = 9.85$, 2 df, $p < .01$. Comparison between total F/T and P/T students by type of school attended (State, Roman Catholic and Other Private only included).

** less than 1%.

TABLE 7

TYPE OF SCHOLARSHIP HELD - INCOMING STUDENTS, 1969

Type of Scholarship Held	Commerce				Engineering				Science				Total			
	F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T		F/T		P/T	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Commonwealth	35	17	24	8	91	24	27	16	32	17	21	23	158	20	72	12
Teachers College	28	14	8	3	1	*	4	2	60	27	2	2	89	11	14	2
Scholarship with bond (Government)	-	-	13	4	54	14	3	2	1	*	4	4	55	7	20	3
Scholarship with bond (non-Government)	3	1	6	2	6	2	5	3	-	-	1	1	9	1	12	2
Colombo Plan	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	*	-	-
Other	5	2	36	11	17	4	23	13	9	4	11	12	31	4	70	12
No scholarship	115	56	203	65	188	50	98	57	103	46	49	54	406	50	350	61
No information	18	9	22	7	17	11	13	7	20	9	3	3	55	7	38	7
TOTAL	204		312		378		173		225		91		807		576	

* less than 1%

TABLE 8

HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE - MEAN CO-ORDINATE MARK

INCOMING STUDENTS - 1969

H.S.C.	Commerce		Engineering		Science	
	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T
Mean Mark	513.7	501.1	544.8	526.7	534.4	527.6
Standard Deviation	53.1	46.9	59.9	58.5	71.5	62.9

TABLE 9
REASONS FOR ATTENDING UNIVERSITY - INCOMING STUDENTS, 1969

Students answering "Very Important" or "Important" to these statements	Commerce				Engineering				Science				Total			
	F/T N = 204		P/T N = 312		F/T N = 378		P/T N = 173		F/T N = 225		P/T N = 91		F/T N = 807		P/T N = 576	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A degree is necessary for the occupation I plan to enter.	190	93	264	85	364	96	165	95	213	95	82	90	767	95	511	89
A degree is necessary for entry to most well-paid occupations.	176	86	275	88	304	80	132	76	176	78	65	71	656	81	472	82
I have always assumed that I would go to university after leaving school.	100	49	123	39	189	50	66	38	112	50	29	32	401	50	218	38
My parents wanted me to go to university.	78	38	83	26	129	34	45	26	74	33	19	21	281	35	147	25
Most of my friends are going to a university.	22	11	26	8	21	6	18	9	21	9	8	9	64	8	52	9
University education is the best way to become generally well-educated.	137	67	203	64	230	61	99	57	127	56	53	70	494	61	355	62